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FEB 2 1965

MUSEUM OF COMPARATIVE ZOOLOGY
HARVARD UNIVERSITY
CAMBRIDGE 38, MASSACHUSETTS
"THE AGASSIZ MUSEUM"

February 1, 1965

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Genetics Department
School of Medicine
Stanford University
Palo Alto, California

Dear Josh:

I gather that you read the schizophrenia paper in Nature, and that you have certain misgivings. Naturally, so do I. However, for many years I have been trying to get the psychiatric community to take a greater interest in the problem, but without success. The arguments of course are always the same, it is a syndrome that is difficult to diagnose, it is highly variable and no one knows whether it is one or several diseases, it has a large environmental component, etc. To me these defeatist arguments do not make any sense. I agree with Popper that one cannot advance in science unless one proposes models that can be falsified. Slater's genetic model for the inheritance of schizophrenia, as well as the Mayr-Huxley model of morphism, are models that can be disproven. This is entirely independent of the question whether or not schizophrenics can be chemically identified and whether or not such chemical components are cause or effect.

MAYR, E.

There is not a single schizophrenic among either close or distant relatives of mine, but I have heard of families where the psychoanalysts have caused veritable tragedies. Imagine how you would feel if you had a schizophrenic child and the Doctor told you that it is all the fault of the mother. The myth of the mother-induced schizophrenia still seems to be the prevalent theory of schizophrenia among psychoanalysts, in spite of all the twin studies etc. This permits us no controls, indeed it essentially discourages all research. I know from the attitude of the psychoanalysts that this theory cannot be falsified, because they simply would not accept falsifications that would seem decisive to anyone else.

2/24/65 Xerox sent to G. Hamburg.

Dr. Joshua Lederberg

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I believe about one in a hundred families suffers under the tragic burden of this illness, and yet of the fifty, or seventy, or ninety million dollars which NIH has already spent on research in this area, I feel, after looking at many of the titles of the research projects, that most of that money has been wasted. If the paper in Nature stimulates further research I will be happy even if this research should lead to a falsification of the proposed model.

With best regards.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ernst".

Ernst Mayr

EM:sm